DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 218 CG 028 488

AUTHOR Lane-Garon, Pamela S.; Nelsen, Edward A.
TITLE An Exploration of Children's Strategy Choices for Resolving Conflict.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Children; *Conflict Resolution; Elementary Secondary Education; Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; *Mediation Theory; Peer Counseling; Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

Socially competent children have been found to be effective negotiators, typically selecting more adaptive, non-physical strategies for resolving conflicts with peers. To explore this association, background information involving research with children's social strategies is presented. The research is part of a larger study concerning school-based peer-mediation. Of 112 4th-8th grade students in a bicultural school community, 62 were selected and trained to mediate the disputes of their peers on the playground. Another 50 students served as a comparison group for evaluation. The 50 nonmediators were aware of the program and sometimes participated as disputants in mediations on the playground. Training was assisted by the Arizona Attorney General's Office of Community Relations and the interval between pre- and post intervention was six months. Ninety-eight students responded to the conflict strategy survey, "Problem-Solving Scenarios." Results show that mediation training and practice seem to have the effect of encouraging independent interpersonal problem-solving. The Problem Solving Scenarios conflict survey is included in the report. (MKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 419 218

AN EXPLORATION OF CHILDREN'S STRATEGY CHOICES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

AERA Presentation
San Diego, 1998

Pamela S. Lane-Garon
California State University

Edward A. Nelsen
Arizona State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. Lane Garon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

This presentation represents part of a larger study conducted by one of the presenters entitled, *Social-Cognitive Perspective Taking in Student Mediators*.

CG028488

An Exploration of Children's Strategy Choices for Resolving Conflict

Pamela S. Lane-Garon
California State University

Edward A. Nelsen
Arizona State University

As part of a larger study (Lane-Garon, 1997) of school-based, peer-mediation, students' choice of conflict strategy was explored with a student-initiated survey, *Problem-Solving Scenarios*. The survey items were generated from informal discussion with students and administered pre and post conflict resolution program implementation, along with more formal measures assessing dispositional perspective taking (Davis, 1983; Lane-Garon, 1997).

Background

Social strategy training studies have been shown to improve interpersonal functioning (Selman, 1980; Spivak & Shure, 1985; Chalmers & Townsend, 1990; Santilli and Hudson, 1992). Socially competent children have also been found to be effective negotiators and children who generally select more adaptive, non-physical strategies for resolving conflict with peers (Adalbjarnardottir, 1995). The San Francisco Community Board (SFCB) developed the School Initiatives Peer Mediation Training program (1995) to teach strategies for interpersonal problem-solving to school children. This program was employed to train peer mediators in the present study who then interacted with nontrained peers throughout the school year. Research over two decades has endeavored to determine the impact of these programs. Johnson and Johnson (1995) found that before conflict resolution training, the most frequently reported strategy for all

student participants was *forcing*, while after training, the preferred strategy was *negotiating*. In the present study, a pre-to-post pattern of *reduction in reliance on others* emerged, as did a pattern of *increased preference for dealing directly with the disputant*. What follows is an explorative piece of a larger study which unexpectedly yielded provocative results.

Participants & Assessment

One-hundred twelve students in 4th through 8th grades in a bicultural school community participated. Sixty-two of these students were selected and trained to mediate the disputes of their peers on the playground. Another 50 students served as a comparison group for purposes of evaluation. The 50 nonmediators were aware of the program and sometimes participated as disputants in mediations on the playground. Training was assisted by the Arizona State Attorney General's Office of Community Relations. The interval between pre and post intervention was six months. Ninety-eight students responded to the conflict strategy survey, *Problem-Solving Scenarios*. Although no claims are made about the reliability of this measure, it may have some ecological validity as the students generated the questions from their personal experiences at school.

Method

Before peer mediation training, students in grades 4-8 at Cesar Chavez Community School were informally asked, *"What kinds of problems happen between students at this school?"* Conflict survey items were generated from this discussion and administered pre and post conflict resolution program implementation. The original purpose of the discussion and resulting survey was not so much to obtain quantifiable data, but to access

qualitative aspects of the environment and the students' reality. However, the patterns that emerged from the exploration seemed to warrant more analysis than was originally intended. A sample item includes a student-generated stem and cooperatively designed strategy options, *"You tease a certain student a lot and you've gotten in trouble for this in the past. You would solve this problem by..."* After reading the scenarios, respondents selected a preferred conflict resolution strategy from five possible choices. The choices offered for resolving the disputes were as follows: a) mediation, b) adult support, c) peer focused, d) avoidance, and e) destructive. Further explanations of the strategy preferences are offered in Figure 1.

Mediation	seeking help from peer mediators and participating in a problem-solving model together with the disputant
Adult Support	seeking help with problem-solving from teachers, counselors, parents or school staff
Peer Focused	talking it out or saying sorry directly to the disputant without assistance of a third party
Avoidance	ignoring or avoiding the disputant
Destructive	physical fighting

Figure 1. **Types of strategy choices available to respondents.**

*Note. Avoidance and Destructive categories were dropped from the analysis due to infrequent responses.

Results

The percentages of respondents choosing each problem-solving strategy were compared between pre and post assessments. *Destructive* and *Avoidance* responses were dropped from the analysis because of the low percentages: 5% at pre and 1% at post for Destructive and 0% for Avoidance, respectively.

A chi-square analysis revealed significant shifts found in preferences for peer mediation, adult support and peer-focused solution. However, a repeated measures analysis of variance was employed to also compare the change across gender groups.

Mediation. This analysis revealed that both trained ($\bar{x}$ = 86) and untrained ($\bar{x}$ = .91) females expressed a strong preference for mediation as a strategy choice at pre-intervention assessment. Females substantially reduced this preference by posttest (trained, $\bar{x}$ = .41) and untrained $\bar{x}$ = .36 (see Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 2-4). In contrast, male mediators and nonmediators showed only slight changes in preference for mediation as an interpersonal problem-solving strategy. A significant interaction was revealed between gender and the time of testing (pre to post), $F(1,94) = 6.13$, $p < .02$ (see Table 2).

Adult Support. Means of preferences for adult support decreased (see Table 1). The repeated measures analysis of variance results, summarized in Table 2, indicate that the decrease in this strategy preference for subjects overall, is highly significant, $F(1,94) = 19.35$, $p < .001$. That is, mediators and nonmediators, males and females, all showed decrease from pre-to-post intervention assessment preference for consulting adults when resolving interpersonal conflict. This change was most dramatic, however, for male mediators who preferred to seek help from adults ($\bar{x}$ = .88) at pretest but rarely preferred this strategy choice at posttest ($\bar{x}$ = .12). The interaction between gender and change in

Table 1

Strategy Preference (Means) for Pre and Post Assessment

N = 98

	Mediators (n = 54)	Non Mediators (n = 44)	Male Mediators (n = 25)	Male NonMediators (n = 22)	Female Mediators (n = 29)	Female NonMediators (n = 22)
Mediation						
Pre	.69	.66	.52	.41	.86	.91
Post	.49	.36	.56	.36	.41	.36
Shift	-.20	-.30	+.04	-.05	-.45	-.55
Adult Support						
Pre	.63	.61	.88	.68	.38	.55
Post	.15	.34	.12	.27	.17	.40
Shift	-.48	-.27	-.76	-.41	-.21	-.15
Peer-Focused						
Pre	.58	.52	.44	.59	.72	.46
Post	1.37	1.23	1.32	1.36	1.41	1.09
Shift	+.79	+.71	+.88	+.77	+.69	+.63

Note 1. - indicates decrease in preference. + indicates increase in preference.
Note 2. N is reduced due to missing data from 14 subjects in pretest scores.

Table 2

Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for Pre-to-Post Intervention Shifts in Strategy Choice

N = 98

	Mediation				Adult Support				Peer-Focused			
Source	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p
					Between Subjects							
Mediator	1	.29	.58	.45	1	.39	.85	.36	1	.48	.79	.38
Gender	1	1.46	2.93	.09	1	.61	1.34	.25	1	.01	.01	.95
Mediator X Gender	1	.28	.56	.46	1	.61	1.34	.25	1	1.87	3.08	.08
					Within Subjects							
Pre-to-Post Strategy Choice Shift	1	3.02	6.27	.01	1	6.92	19.34	.001	1	26.82	58.77	.001
Mediator X Time	1	.10	.21	.65	1	.54	1.50	.22	1	.08	.17	.68
Gender X Time	1	2.95	6.13	.02	1	2.06	5.77	.02	1	.32	.71	.40
Mediator X Gender X Time	1	.00	.001	.98	1	.24	.67	.42	1	.009	.02	.89

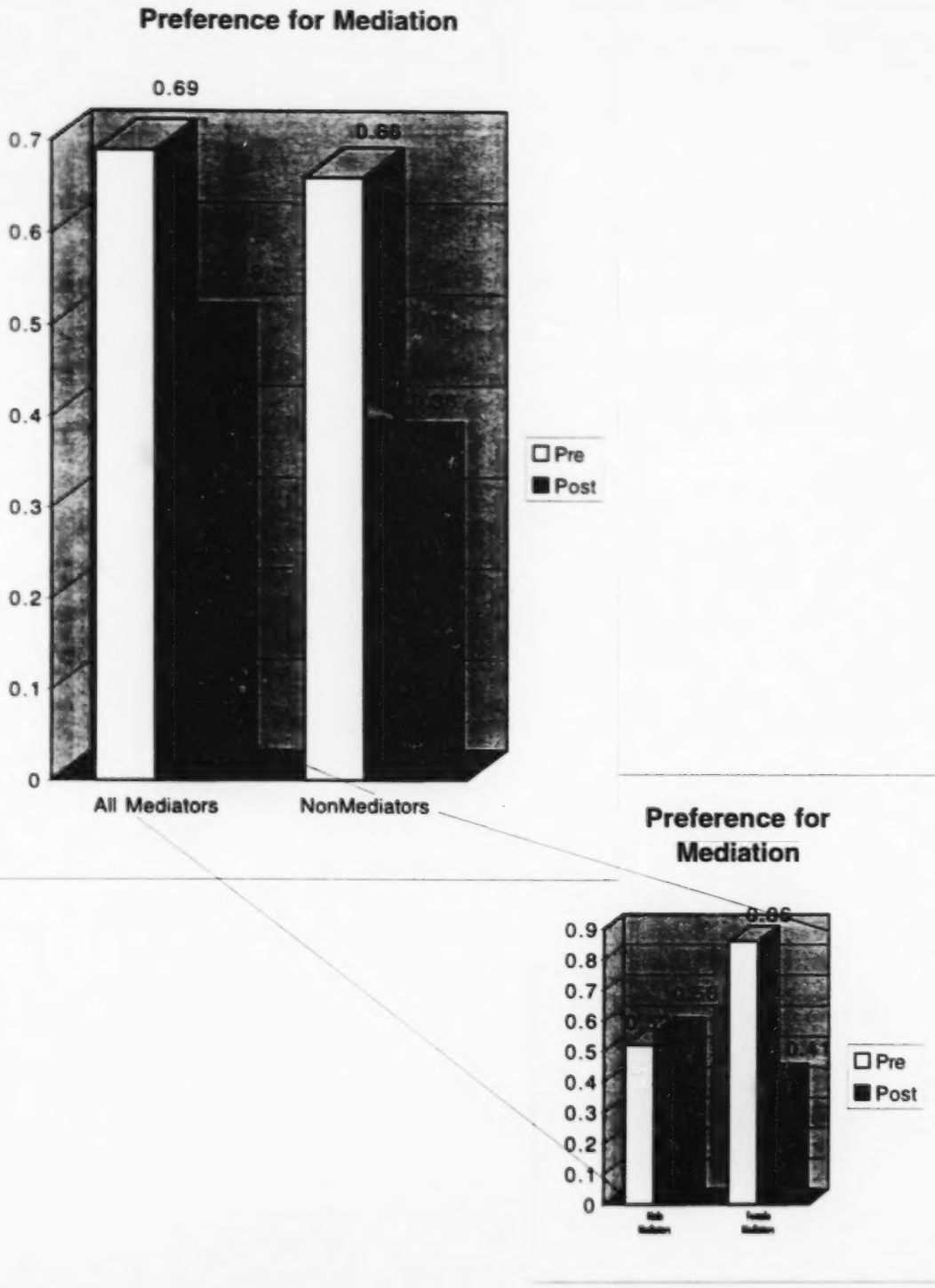

Figure 2. Pre-to-post shift in problem-solving strategy preference for mediation.

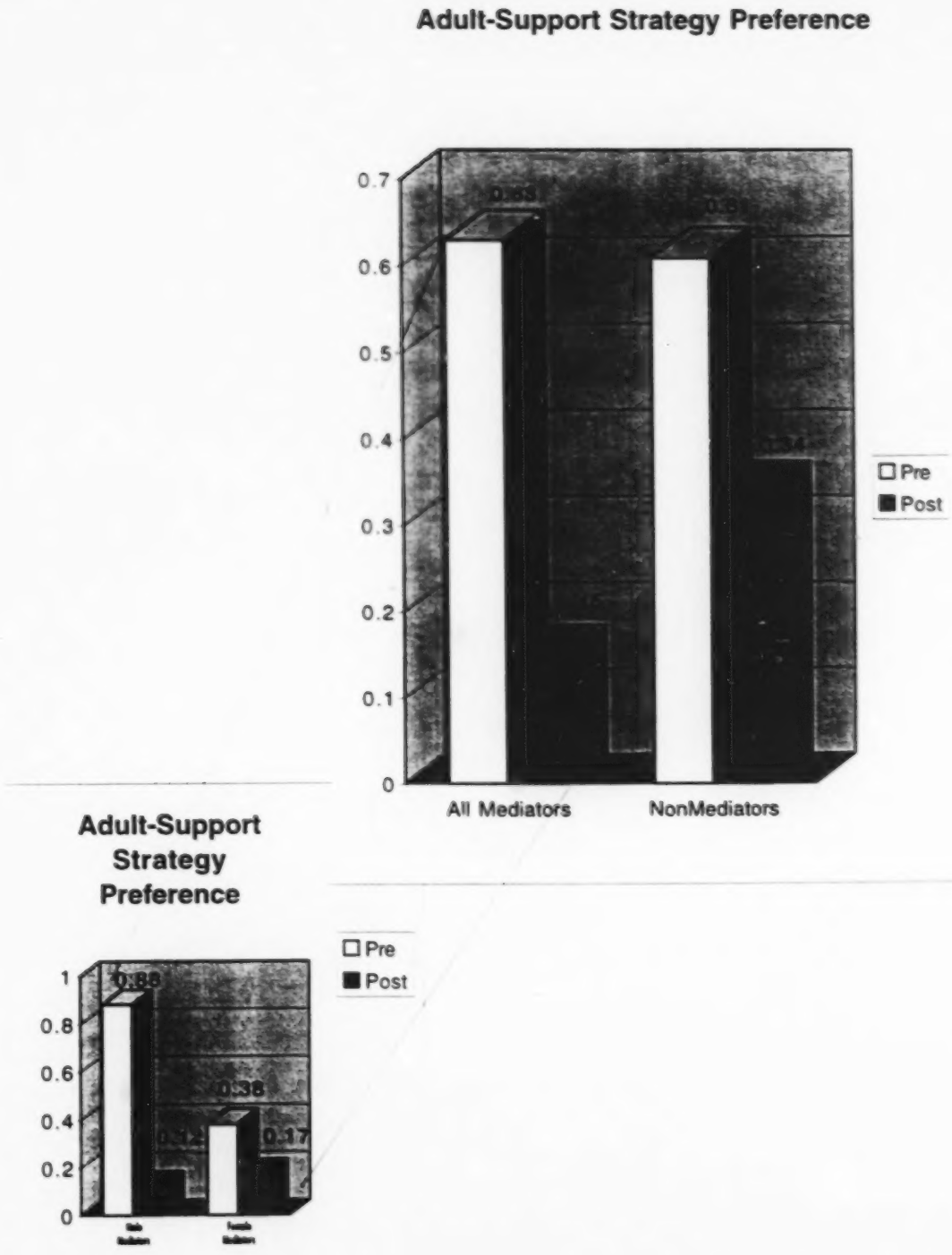

Figure 3. Pre-to-post shift in problem-solving strategy preference for adult-focused solution.

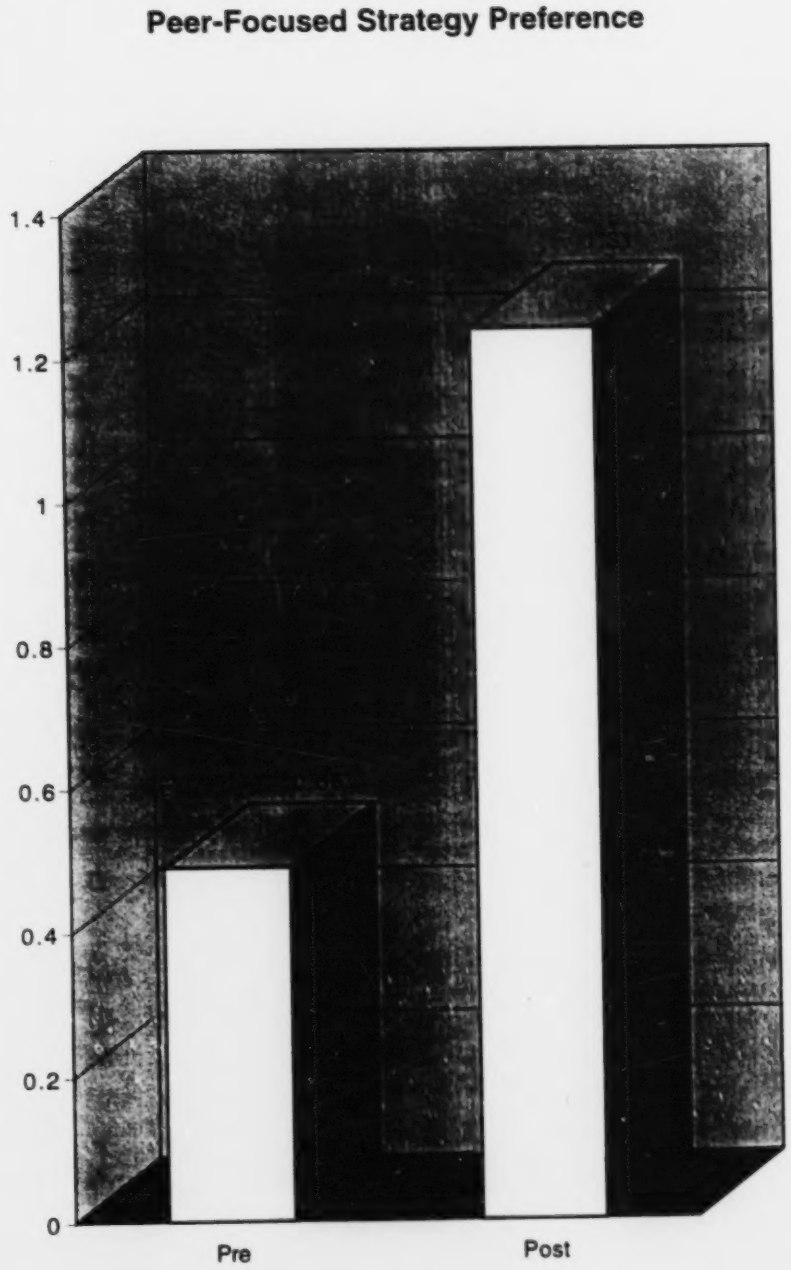

Figure 4. Pre-to-post shift in problem-solving strategy preference for peer-focused solution.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

strategy choice was significant, $F(1,94) = 5.77, p < .02$. Furthermore, boys in both groups initially chose more often to seek adult support, far more than girls. However, the significance test for the gender-by-mediator interaction was inconclusive.

Peer-Focused Strategies. The mean preference for peer-focused problem-solving strategies, summarized in Table 1indicate a large, significant change from pre-to-post intervention assessment. Increased preference for talking to disputant peers directly was seen across all groups, $F(1,94) = 58.77, p < .001$ (see Table 2). A nearly significant interaction between gender and mediator status was also found, $F(1,94) = 3.08, p < .08$. In general, it appears that mediation training and practice may encourage student preference for resolving interpersonal problems by speaking directly to the peer in the dispute.

Discussion

Results of this informal exploration tentatively suggest that students' typical strategy choice in conflict situations may be affected by peer mediation/conflict resolution program activity. The tentative nature of findings is emphasized due to the fact that the survey itself was not designed to answer very particular questions, but rather to qualitatively explore the students' reality with respect to the kinds of conflicts they were experiencing on their campus. Thus, no claims are made about the measure's reliability, although ecological validity, as mentioned previously, may be a positive feature as the students generated the stems of the items.

Gender interactions in the present study indicated that boys and girls reacted to training differently, with boys initially preferring to seek help and girls initially being less

dependent on adult assistance. Also, in the Chavez study, all groups showed pre-to-post movement towards independent problem-solving. In the Johnson et al., (1995) study subjects were Midwestern, middle-class, Anglo students as contrasted with this sample's mostly Hispanic participants. Despite differences in sample characteristics and strategy coding methods, however, changes in strategy preferences were reported in both studies.

In sum, students trained as mediators do not always choose mediation to resolve all interpersonal problems. In fact, their training appears to make them aware of the *many* ways to approach disputes with peers. In this study, Mediation training and practice seemed to have the effect of encouraging independent interpersonal problem-solving. Both preference for mediation and for adult support decreased as preference for peer-focused strategies increased across assessment intervals. Additionally, boys and girls, who appeared to have different strategy preferences before training, became more similar in their strategy preferences following training. One of the authors of this paper asked a student about her post-intervention strategy choice. When asked why she indicated a preference for speaking to the student she offended directly she replied, "*Well, you've trained us and I've been a mediator all year...I figure I can handle it.*" Further study with reliable instruments is indicated, however, if *independence in problem-solving* is a result of peer mediation/conflict resolution program implementation, then evidence of the importance of these school-based programs accumulates.

REFERENCES

Adalbjarnardottir, S. (1995). How schoolchildren propose to negotiate: The role of social withdrawal, social anxiety, and locus of control. *Child Development, 66*, 1739-1751.

Chalmers, J.B., & Townsend, M.A. (1990). The effects of training in social perspective taking on sociallly maladjusted girls. *Child Development, 61*, 178-190.

Community Board of San Francisco , Inc. (1995). *School Initiatives Peer Mediator Training Manual*, (2nd ed) San Francisco: Author.

Davis, M. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. Dissertation abstracted in the *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 10*, 4, 85.

Davis, M. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 113-126.

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R. (1995). *Reducing school violence through conflict resolution.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lane-Garon, P. (1997). *Social-cognitive perspective taking in student mediators.* Unpublished dissertation manuscript, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

Santilli, & Hudson (1992). Enhancing moral growth: Is communication the key? *Adolescence, 27*, 105, 145-160.

Selman, R. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding*. NY: Academic Press.

Spivack, G., & Shure, M.L. (1985). ICPS and beyond: Centripetal and centrifugal forces. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13, 226-243.

Conflict Survey: Problem-Solving Scenarios

Directions: Think about the following problem and pick the best solution.

1. A classmate spreads an untrue rumor about you and a girl. You would solve this problem by:

   a) asking for mediation
   b) talking to a teacher
   c) talking to the classmate who spread the rumor
   d) avoiding that student
   e) other_____
   _____

2. A classmate threatens to beat you up if you don't give him your money. You would solve this problem by:

   a) talking to an adult
   b) trying to avoid that classmate
   c) beating him up first
   d) asking for mediation
   e) other_____
   _____

1. You accidentally spread gossip about another student. This student is now mad at you. You would solve this problem by:

   a) talking to the student you offended
   b) asking for mediation
   c) talking to a teacher or a counselor
   d) getting into a fight
   e) other_____
   _____

2. You tease a certain student a lot and you've gotten in trouble for this in the past. You would solve this problem by:

   a) asking for mediation
   b) avoiding this student
   c) saying sorry
   d) talking to an adult
   e) other_____
   _____